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ABSTRACT

The Working Partnership project at the University of Tennessee (UT) has been built upon the belief that vocational and technical teacher education and teaching require the expertise that business and industry can provide. Higher education programs are kept most relevant and up-to-date when business and industry provide continuous input into the nature and quality of the education provided. Working partnerships link the teacher education program with participating agencies, businesses, and secondary vocational-technical programs in a cooperative relationship. Individual programs and their public or private sector partners can develop activities at their own pace, consistent with their interests, needs, and resources. One-to-one pairing enables businesses to support improvements in vocational-technical education in a concrete and manageable way. Partnership activities have included classes at business sites, joint curriculum development, summer job programs, and school staff internships. Benefits accrue to both the vocational-technical program and the private or public sector partner. For example, a benefit of the Working Partnership of the UT teacher education department and the Tennessee Valley Authority has been the department's new awareness of its role in economic development. (YLB)

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Collaborative Efforts Among Institutions and Agencies for the Improvement of Vocational-Technical Education

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Introduction

In recent years, vocational-technical education has been criticized by prominent individuals and various special interest groups. New and developing technologies that require different knowledge and skills, have also exerted a somewhat negative impact. Teacher educators and teachers are personally struggling to keep current with changing professional and occupational requirements. For example, most vocational-technical teachers find their facilities and equipment so outdated that they are unable to provide the job related experiences their students need.

It is essential that vocational-technical educators become more involved with other institutions and agencies. Such involvement would represent a long overdue recognition that schools cannot do the job alone. Business and industry are an essential link in providing relevant job preparation. They must be called upon to provide the technical expertise needed to upgrade vocational-technical teachers and to provide the work experience necessary for them to become proficient in new skills. Both the public and private sectors ought to be asked to provide the capstone, real-world training, experiences needed by students to learn

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new skills and to practice on equipment not available to them in the schools.

Partnership arrangements between business, industry, government and vocational-technical education have traditionally developed through advisory committees. While many advisory committees have been effective, they tend to be utilized only when a program is being evaluated or when it is in trouble. Vocational and technical education need and "operational" plan rather than just advisory relationships.

Educators must take the initiative to clarify and resolve the problems of communication and collaboration. Industry needs well-trained employees and vocational-technical teachers are charged with the responsibility of providing such workers. Yet, we often do not adequately communicate with each other regarding our needs and problems. Business, industry, government and education must work together in a cooperative manner if the needs of all parties are to be met.

Vocational-technical education has not worked as cooperatively with business and industry as it should. We have had, in far too many cases, a "parasitic" relationship. Dr. Rupert Evans, in an attempt to get vocational-technical education into a mutual symbiotic relationship, asks, "How can mutual symbiosis be created? Nine-tenths of the answer comes with an understanding that mutual symbiosis occurs only when all the parties involved profit from most of their exchanges. Any business or educational institution which

plans on long-term survival will seek to ensure that every one of its transactions result in mutual advantage. Its leaders accept this as a necessity, they design their actions so that both they and the people with whom they deal will gain from almost every step they take." (Evans, 1983)

While it has long been an accepted principle that vocational-technical education should cooperate with the public and private sectors, an operational plan for developing such a symbiotic relationship did not exist. Advisory committees have been used to promote public relations, evaluate and assist with pressing problems, but there has been no coherent structure and process for a long-term productive alliance to leverage change in the school program. A model for solving this problem must be developed.

An ever-growing list of reports of commissions, task forces and researchers underscores the publics' perception that something is wrong with our schools. The Gallup Organization has been conducting annual polls on the subject for years. While almost half of the respondents graded their schools A or B in 1974, that proportion fell to just over a third (37 percent in 1983). What is thought to be wrong with our schools? Among the problems indentified by Gallup that have increased in importance during the 1970's are poor curriculum and low academic standards (22 percent in 1982). As to what people think can be done about the

deterioration of public schools, 84 percent of the public agreed that "developing the best educational system in the world" was very important.

Two things Americans believe in, according to recent surveys, are that more emphasis is needed on basic educational skills (reading, writing and arithmetic) and that quality vocational-technical training needs to be provided. Vocational-technical training came in a strong second on this list and was endorsed by 56 percent of the respondents. It is interesting to note that no other goal was selected by a majority, even though a list of 13 items was presented. (Kirschten, 1983)

Educators, industrialists, businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats and the general public are all promoting the need for close cooperation in the movement to revitalize the educational system. A spirit of cooperation is emerging with the private sector exhibiting an increased interest in becoming more involved in education. In fact, most of the 108 senior executives of Fortune 1300 companies who responded to a poll conducted by Research & Forecasts, Inc. indicated that "they believed business should become more involved in public education. (Business Poll Foresees, 1984)

Donald M. Clark, President of the National Association for Industry Education Cooperation, wrote, "The central purpose of industry-education cooperation is to

redirect or restructure the total academic and vocational program in schools and postsecondary insitutions to meet current and emerging needs in the work place. A broad-based, coherent effort is required to bring the employment community and education into better alignment and facilitate the movement of youth and adults from here (the classroom) to there (the work place)." (Clark, 1983)

The implementation of advanced technology to generate urgently needed increases in productivity requires, in one executive's words, "a tremendous effort on the part of the education community and a major commitment on the part of business and industry." (Rich, 1983)

During testimony before the House Economic Stabilization Subcommittee, William H. Monteith, founder and owner of a small company that makes molds for the plastics industry, called for closer ties between vocational education and employers. He pointed out that schools "are not prone to working with industry" but are inclined "toward producing a product...whether or not there is a need - a job for that product."

Donald Cook, Division Vice President of Government Services, RCA Company, in an attempt to redefine the relationship between industry and vocational-technical education, emphasized that "resolving the dilemma will require serious re-examination of the traditional roles and responsibilities of both institutions and will almost

certainly compel us to redefine the relationship between the two. We need to begin with and concentrate on three areas: Communications, job development and academic vocational-technical preparation."

Cook also gave vocational-technical educators encouragement in forming partnerships when he wrote, "So long as educators and industry leaders alike understand that each must be a welcome participant in the other's world, that there is, in fact, a mutuality of interests which binds the two worlds, the challenge posed by the future will be met to the credit of both and the benefit of all our people."

While the need for improved cooperation between business, industry, labor, government and vocational-technical schools has been pointed out, Donald Clark maintains that "what is needed at this time is less rhetoric on the merits of collaboration and more attention to...productive industry-education joint efforts."

A study from the New York Stock Exchange's Office of Economic Research entitled, "People and Productivity: A Challenge to Corporate America" recommends greater business involvement in schools. Specific suggestions include "Adopt-a-School Programs", provisions for tutoring services, special curriculum program needs, equipment, cooperative work study programs and career education programs.

The California Roundtable, made up of 86 California executives, suggested that corporations lend their employees to schools to improve instruction. Improvements in curriculum and instruction also were the concern of Douglas S. Katz, Vice President of Conserva, Inc. While director of a project to make effective use of volunteers in vocational-technical education, he located employer groups "that adopted a curriculum important to their business and dentists who contributed time to a dental assistant training program."

Working Partnerships

The working partnership project was built upon the belief that vocational and technical teacher education and teaching are too important to be left solely in the hands of educators. Since most expertise about jobs resides within the business and industrial community, cooperative partnerships provide the only assurance that our teacher education offerings will remain accountable to students, trainers, businesses and industrial employers alike. It is also believed that higher education alone cannot carry out the task of preparing graduates for employment.
In addition we believe that higher education programs will be kept most relevant and up-to-date when business and industry are able to provide continuous input. It is essential that they have input into the nature and quality of the education provided.

All the institutions and agencies participating in our working partnerships wanted to develop long lasting relationships that would not be terminated at the end of an academic year. We also wanted to develop a symbonic relationship that was not of a parasite nature. Thus the idea of "Joint Ventures" was established.

Working partnerships link our teacher education program with participating agencies, businesses and secondary vocational-technical programs in a cooperative relationship. These are voluntary arrangements between vocational-technical programs and a public or private sector agency that combine the energies and resources of the partners to enrich various aspects of the education process. This is one of the best ways to encourage greater business and community involvement in support of vocational-technical education.

Working partnerships are especially attractive because of their simplicity and flexibility. Individual programs and their public or private sector partner can develop activities at their own pace, consistent with their interests, needs, and resources. One-to-one pairing enables buisnesses to support improvements in vocational-technical education in a concrete and manageable way. Corporations, industries, retail stores, government agencies, community organizations, service clubs, unions, and trade/agricultural associations can all be effective community partners.

Types of partnership activities vary depending on partnership interests, needs, and resources.

Examples include, but are not limited to, the following: (a) classes for students at business sites, (b) joint development of curriculum reflecting current technology and practices, (c) summer job programs for youth, (d) career education and exploration, (e) school staff internships, (f) mini-grants to supplement school programs, (g) field trips, (h) shop or classroom speakers, (i) tutoring assistance, (j) job readiness, career opportunity and work attitudes seminars, and (k) executives-on-loan to assist management operations. These are just a few of the many activities that community partners and vocational-technical programs can undertake together. Through the cumulative effect of such cooperative efforts, a working partnership can improve the educational environment at a school.

Each business/vocational-technical program pair develops its own range of cooperative projects - some on a small scale, some more extensive. These activities, however, should be seen not as one-time efforts, but as part of an ongoing cooperative relationship. Mature partnerships seek to emphasize staff, curriculum and student development initiatives, rather than token involvement limited to requests for and contributions of money.

Partnerships foster special bonds of cooperation and mutual respect between schools and the communities they serve. Ultimately, joint ventures serve the interests of students, the schools, the business community, non-profit rganizations and the community as a whole.

Benefits of a Working Partnership

What such ventures can offer varies widely, and has included:

FOR THE VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL PROGRAM

. A broadened base of support.

. Guidance and assistance in developing knowledge and skills needed for employment.

. Part-time cooperative work experience for students as a capstone learning event.

. Technical upgrading and updating for teachers through personnel exchange programs, work experiences, participationg in company training programs, attendance at seminars and/or workships and expert assistance in the school shop.

. Assistance in updating and upgrading programs, equipment and facilities.

. Volunteer examiners for performance testing.

. An opportunity to bring the "outside world of work" to students.

FOR THE PRIVATE OR PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNER

. An expanded view of the needs of vocational-technical education within the community and an opportunity to contribute directly to their programs.

. Programmatic changes consistent with employer expectations.

. Long-term improvements in the work-readiness and productivity of qualified entry level teachers and workers.

. An improved climate for business through a vital and healthy education system.

. Supplemental training for workers in reading, writing, science, mathematics, reasoning, speaking, listening, and manual skills.

. Enhanced visibility and recognition for valued public service.

FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

. Improved understanding between and among key elements of the community.

. Stimulation for other cooperative efforts within the community.

. Realization of the impact the life of the community has on the quality of the schools.

. Voluntary staff and student labor on community projects.

. Increased involvement in youth activities/clubs.

The Vocational-technical School Perspective

A joint venture can provide many benefits for a school, but most importantly, it serves as a mechanism for bringing the "outside world" directly into contact with directors, instructors and the students themselves. This outside contact means a broader audience for positive school efforts, an exchange of new ideas, a better understanding of other viewpoints and the chance to be better understood. It can also offer contacts to draw on in meeting future needs and an opportunity to make the vocational-technical education process more relevant and accountable to community employers.

For all students, outside contacts can lead to increased motivation to stay in school and greater awareness of work-world opportunities and expectations.

The need for community contact and support is important for school districts, as well as for individual schools. Most school systems directly serve only a small percentage of the households in their respective communites. A joint venture program can have the most impact as part of a larger strategy for reducing the isolation of the schools from the broader community and for increasing public awareness of what the school system has to offer.

The Business/Community Perspective

"Outside contact" is an important part of what businesses gain from partnerships as well. Businesses can become isolated too - so a broader vision on the part of employees can be a real asset, particularly as businesses are expected to be more and more sensitive to the views of the larger community. They also recognize that schools determine, in large measure, the quality of future employees.

Most significant for business, however, is the link between the schools and the vitality of a community or region. Declining schools can mean a declining community. But good schools help make a region an attractive and economically healthy place to live.

Teacher Education

Teacher education programs are not in a position to offer all that is needed by its constituencies. A strategy such as Working Partnerships does help. For example, the working partnerships between the departmental teacher education effort and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) has resulted in the following accomplishments to date.

1. Paid internships for undergraduate and graduate students.
2. Employed a Liasion Person to facilitate action between the two parties. (Chair funded by TVA)
3. Provided guest speakers for classes, workshops, and seminars.
4. A graduate student Seminar lasting a year entitled, "Industrial Training for Economic Development"
5. Professional development plans that involve exchanges for the personnel of TVA and the Department.
6. A project to train math, science, industrial arts and vocational instructors in the "Principles of Technology"
7. Opportunities for the faculty to become involved in the evaluation of several nationally recognized projects.
8. Opportunity to be provided a demonstration model for faculty's research projects.
9. Opportunity to share research and publish findings at professional meetings and publish results.
10. Feasibility Study to determine a need for a regional training center.
11. A joint venture in working on the retraining and placement of redundant workers.
12. Opportunities for linkages with universities and agencies in other countries.
13. Implementation of a computer network with TVA that can be expanded to include other institutions.

Other outcomes from partnership activities include:

1. Professional assistance in designing new courses and alternating existing courses to better serve participants.
2. Increased departmental enrollments. (Undergraduate enrollments have increased 12% per year during the last four years--Graduate enrollments have increased 8-10%)

3. 85% of departmental graduates continue on to Graduate School.
4. Better able to obtain assistance for vocational-technical teachers, from the private sector, in training and grants for programs in the form of funds, and equipment.
5. Develop a wider variety of qualified faculty.
6. Gained strength by working with business, industrial, health and community leaders.
7. Better able to work effectively with other Colleges and Departments within the University such as Business, Nursing, Engineering, Health and Safety, Sociology, Industrial Psychology.
8. In a position to work on mutual projects with other State Agencies including the: Department of Labor, Economic Development, and Industrial Training.
9. Consulting opportunities in business and industry.

While this Partnership has great potential for the Department, it has made another contribution that shouldn't be overlooked. Before, forming this linkage the department has lost sight of the fact that vocational-technical education is a key to economic development, with the major investment being made in human capital. Working with TVA has reminded us of this mission and given us new direction for our role in economic development.

Many are aware of the long history that TVA has in power generation and flood control but probably few know that they have also provided Vocational-Technical education since 1936. It is important to emphasize the reason why TVA offers vocational-technical education to the citizens of seven states in the Tennessee Valley. TVA does this because it is important to the ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT of the Valley. Historically, vocational-technical education was started because of economic circumstances. This has continued to be the underlying reason for its existance and continuance but

the focus and most of the attention has been directed to the social aspects of preparing people for entry into occupations.

Looking back at the first meeting with TVA, it shouldn't have surprised us that we had not previously developed linkages. We were working in two different spheres. The department was primarily designed for preparing teachers for public schools - a social institution; while TVA was working with business and industry - economic institutions.

If we were planning how to replicate our accomplishments with TVA, so that it would be effective in another university, we would suggest the following:

1. Develop degree programs that prepare graduates for business and industry along side of teacher education programs. With pressures coming from the Holmes Group and Colleges wanting to do away with undergraduate degree programs in teacher education or extend their degrees to five years, it is imperative that these programs be initiated to offset adverse pressures.
2. Set-aside existing resources or obtain outside resources for travel, meetings, consultants and release time for faculty.
3. Develop expertise in workforce planning, labor economics, program planning, program implementation and evaluation that can be used in an industrial setting.
4. Develop accountability and a power base using the influence of business and industry in supporting undergraduate programs that prepares graduates that will meet their needs.
5. Develop the expertise and knowledge to assist business and industry with their training and human resource development needs.
6. Become active in industry related organizations and offer services to assist them in their efforts.
7. Using the contacts developed with business and industry, develop Partnerships to help accomplish the goals of both parties.

8. Work hard and deliver what you promise on time because your business partner will expect you to work as hard as they do!

Lessons Learned

While the Working Partnership project was intended for secondary programs, it has been adopted by several post-secondary schools. Every where the plan has been presented people have been receptive to it and found ways to develop long lasting relationships.

The project intended to utilize the advisory committee structure and change the traditional passive, reactive role into a pro-active one. Members of advisory committees have always been included, however when it comes to providing a show of public support, is usually called to assist us. In the past we have relied upon advisory committee membership from big business. However, in the original plan, this project did not intend to solicit support from big business. This was because they have been some of our most avid critics. Representatives of big business usually tell the public that we should not train students in occupational skills but merely provide strong academic education in communications, mathematics, science and economics. They report that they will provide the necessary training for their employees. It was our belief that the best support would come from small business and industrial firms that cannot afford to provide expensive vocational programs, it is essential that; they have input into the nature and quality of training provided. "Small business owners can't

afford to pay taxes and not get adequately trained workers for their dollars," warned Betsy Schwamberg, executive director of the National Federation of Independent Businesses.

The schools and their educational programs belong to the public. It is their tax dollars that provide support and make the educational programs possible. Thus, it is only logical to involve local business and industry in the affairs of the school.

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